

# The First Arab Expedition against Amorium\*

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The chronology of Byzantine history in the middle of the seventh century is obscure and confused. Among the unsettled problems is the date of the early Arab raids into Asia Minor after the Arabs completed their conquest of Palestine and Syria in 640. The scanty Greek and Oriental Christian sources need supplementation from the Arabic ones. Although Charles C. Torrey published his edition of the *Futūḥ Miṣr* or *History of the Conquest of Egypt, North Africa and Spain* by Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam more than fifty years ago, Byzantinists do not appear to have consulted the important section on Egypt which has not been fully translated into a western language. Yet Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, who was born c. 798–9 and who died in 871, is a significant and early historical authority.<sup>1</sup> He provides a short reference to an Arab expedition against Amorium in the year A.H. 23 (A.D. 644): '... according to Layth b. Sa'd [and] he said 'Wahb b. 'Umayr was commander of the forces of Egypt in the Amorium expedition [*fī ghazwati 'Ammūriyata*] in the year twenty-three and the commander of the forces of Syria [was] Abu'l-A'war al-Sulamī'.<sup>2</sup>

\* I wish to acknowledge the helpful advice of Wilferd Madelung, Irfan Shahīd and John Woods, but I am responsible for any deficiencies.

1. *The History of the Conquest of Egypt, North Africa and Spain Known as the Futūḥ Miṣr of Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam*, ed. C. Torrey (Yale Oriental Series—Researches III, New Haven, 1922). On the work, see Torrey's 'Introduction', pp. 1\*–24\*, and F. Rosenthal, 'Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam', *Encyclopaedia of Islam*<sup>2</sup>, III, pp. 674–5.

2. Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr* (Torrey, p. 108, lines 14–16). Torrey did not include this passage in his earlier abridged translation of a section of Ibn

Greek sources do not mention any Arab raid against Asia Minor during 644. An important Arabic historian who is slightly later than Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, al-Ṭabarī (born 839, died 923), also mentions, but without citing his source, that Mu'āwīya, governor of Damascus and later Caliph, accompanied by several Companions of Muhammad, led a summer expedition as far as Amorium.<sup>3</sup> The late medieval historian Ibn al-Athīr (late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries), who probably relied upon al-Ṭabarī, also reports that Mu'āwīya made an expedition against Asia Minor in A.H. 23, but he does not specify its route or goal.<sup>4</sup> Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam and al-Ṭabarī agree that an expedition took place against Amorium in A.H. 23; there is no good reason to reject their statements. As for the correct identity of the leadership of the expedition of A.H. 23, the fact that Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam is the oldest authority, that his own source for this information was the reliable al-Layth b. Sa'd while al-Ṭabarī does not cite his source, all argue in favour of accepting the testimony of Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam.<sup>5</sup> It is still conceivable, however, that Mu'āwīya served as supreme commander over both of these Syrian and Egyptian forces; this would reconcile Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam and al-Ṭabarī. Abu'l-A'war al-Sulamī was an important associate of Mu'āwīya. He commanded a number of important expeditions;

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'Abd al-Ḥakam, 'The Mohammedan Conquest of Egypt and North Africa . . . 643 to 705', *Yale Bicentennial Publications: Biblical and Semitic Studies* (New York—London, 1901), 279–330. Amorium was a city of Galatia Salutaris; it later became capital of the important Anatolic Theme: Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De thematibus*, ed. A. Pertusi with commentary (*Studi e Testi*, 160: [Vatican City, 1952]), p. 115.

3. Al-Ṭabarī, *Annales*, ed. M. J. de Goeje (reprinted, Leiden, 1964), Ser. 1, V, 2798. Cf. L. Caetani, *Annali dell'Islam* (Milan, 1912), V, pp. 32–3. Without other confirmation one cannot accept the testimony of the early sixteenth-century Persian historian Khvānd Amīr that Amorium actually fell in A.D. 23 to Mu'āwīya: ' . . . and in this same year Mu'āwīya also brought Amorium under his control'. Khvānd Amīr, *Ḥabīb al-siyar*, ed. Jalāl al-Dīn Humā'ī (Teheran, 1954), I, p. 474. I thank my colleague John Woods for translating the passage from Persian. Khvānd Amīr is too late to serve as a definitive authority on the seventh century; he does not, moreover, cite his own source.

4. Ibn al-Athīr, *Chronicon* . . . , ed. C. J. Tornberg (Leiden, 1869), III, p. 60.

5. On the reliability of al-Layth b. Sa'd, see Torrey's 'Introduction' to his edition of Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam's *Futūḥ Miṣr*, p. 6\*.

these included the campaign which resulted in the major naval battle of Phoenix opposite the coast of Lycia in 655, and also raids against Cyprus, Cos and Crete.<sup>6</sup> Al-Ṭabarī and Ibn al-Athīr may have confused Mu'āwiya's participation in an expedition against Amorium in 646 with this earlier one, probably the earliest against Amorium, in 644. The first Arab expedition into any section of Asia Minor occurred in A.H. 21 (A.D. 642), according to the early and usually reliable al-Balādhurī, but other authorities may be correct that it took place in A.H. 20 (A.D. 641).<sup>7</sup>

No other details exist concerning the Amorium expedition of 644. It was not a minor raid, for it was sufficiently ambitious to include troops from Egypt as well as Syria. Indeed, it is noteworthy that only two years after completing their conquest of Egypt, the Arabs felt so secure that they could spare some soldiers from Egypt for a distant campaign against the Byzantines inside Asia Minor. That the object of the expedition was Amorium is testimony to the strategic importance which the city assumed immediately after the Arabs overran Syria. Together, the accounts of Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam and al-Ṭabarī emphasize how speedily the Arabs were able to mount major expeditions deep into Asia Minor. Their testimony about the expedition of A.H. 23 does not merely move up the date of the earliest expedition two or three years. They reveal that the new government of the young Emperor Constans II benefited from almost no respite after the end of the bitter struggle for the imperial succession at the death of Heraclius in 641: the first Arab raid against Asia Minor in 641 or 642 was followed by a major one deep into its core only two or three years later. Many expeditions against Amorium would follow in the next two

6. On Abu'l-A'war, see H. Lammens, 'Études sur le règne du Calife Omayyade Mo'āwia Ier', *Mélanges de la Faculté Orientale, Université Saint-Joseph*, I (1906), 42-3, 48-50; H. Lammens, 'Abu'l-A'war', *Encyclopaedia of Islam*<sup>2</sup>, I, p. 108. For the expeditions: Theophanes, *Chron.*, A.M. 6146 (ed. C. de Boor [Leipzig, 1883], I, p. 345); Michael the Syrian, *Chronique*, 11.10 (ed. J.-B. Chabot [Paris, 1901], II, pp. 441-2).

7. Al-Balādhurī, *Liber Expugnationis Regionum* (ed. M. I. de Goeje [Leiden, 1866, reprinted 1968], pp. 136-7). Al-Balādhurī died c. 892. Testimony for A.H. 20 (A.D. 641): al-Ṭabarī (de Goeje, ser. 1, V, 2594), Ibn al-Athīr, *Chronicon* (Tornberg, II, p. 444) and Michael the Syrian, *Chronique* 11.8 (Chabot II, p. 431); Caetani, *Annali dell' Islam*, IV, pp. 218-19.

centuries. In conclusion, the earliest Arab expedition against Amorium surely occurred not in A.H. 25 (A.D. 646), but in A.H. 23 (A.D. 644), although Mu'āwiya probably did command a separate one in A.H. 25.<sup>8</sup> The details and achievements, if any, of the expedition of A.H. 23 are unknown, except that it was obviously not so unsuccessful that the Arabs refrained from mounting other expeditions against Amorium and Asia Minor later in that decade.

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8. E. W. Brooks, 'The Arabs in Asia Minor (641–750), from Arabic Sources', *JHS*, XVIII (1898), 183, lists the raid of A.H. 25 by Mu'āwiya which reached Amorium. In another historical survey of Arab expeditions, Brooks cites no sources, but mentions the Arab capture of Arabissus in Cappadocia in 643, and a raid by Mu'āwiya which resulted in the sack of Euchaita in 644; the earliest raid against Amorium which he mentions is that by Mu'āwiya in 646: 'The Successors of Heraclius to 717', *Cambridge Medieval History*, II (1926), p. 393. A. Stratos, *Tò Byzantion ston Z'alōva* (Athens, 1972), IV, pp. 40–2, esp. n. 140 on p. 41, mentions no raid against Amorium earlier than a single one by Mu'āwiya which he dates to A.D. 647. Torrey's edition of the *Futūḥ Miṣr* appeared too late for inclusion in the analyses of L. Caetani, *Annali dell'Islam*, or of E. W. Brooks in his *JHS* article, or of Julius Wellhausen in his 'Die Kämpfe der Araber mit den Römern in der Zeit der Umayyiden', *Nachrichten von der Königl. Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen, Philologisch-historische Klasse* (1901), pp. 414–47.

Amorium became the residence of the commander of the Anatolic theme, but its exact status at this time is obscure: A. Pertusi, 'Commentario' to his critical edition of Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, *De Thematribus* (Studi e Testi, 160 [Vatican City, 1952]), p. 115. R.-J. Lilie, *Die byzantinische Reaktion auf die Ausbreitung der Araber* (Miscellanea Byzantina Monacensia, 22 [Munich, 1976]), provides a synthesis of recent scholarship on the early Arab invasions; many of his conclusions are sensible. He did not know of the passage in Ibn 'Abd al-Hakam; on p. 63 he lists an expedition for 644 under Mu'āwiya that went as far as Amorium, but in n. 12 on p. 63 he expresses doubt concerning the existence of the expedition: 'Möglicherweise handelt es sich hier um den Einfall des Jahres 646, der ebenfalls bis vor Amorion führte.' The conclusions of Lilie concerning the expedition of 644 must be modified. There was an expedition against Amorium in 644; the only question is whether its commander was Mu'āwiya.